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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF CURRENT INTELLIGENCE
10 October 1961

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CURRENT INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Portuguese National Elections on 12 November 1961

1. Offices to be filled: All 130 seats in the National Assembly. Ten seats have been added since the last election to give increased representation to the "overseas provinces."

2. Background: Under the Salazar dictatorship, elections are little more than a formality. Although its legislative powers are guaranteed by the Portuguese constitution and on occasion its members engaged in heated debate, the assembly is controlled by Salazar and functions almost entirely as a "rubber stamp." During the seven or eight months of the year when the assembly is not in session, the government legislates by decree.

A wide variety of controls ensures a continued monopoly of seats by the regime. These controls include the withholding of the lists of registered voters from the opposition until a day or two before elections, restrictions on public opposition meetings, imprisonment of candidates, and invalidation of opposition lists.

During the 30-day period before elections, oppositionists are granted some latitude in expressing their views and promoting their candidates. Most opposition candidates usually withdraw the last few days before the vote, however, charging that government control over the electoral process makes their position intolerable.

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3. Parties participating: The National Union is the only political movement allowed to operate freely. Salazar has held the positions of President and chairman of the central committee since he organized the party in 1930; it adheres completely to his conservative, corporative, and authoritarian policies.

Although they are legally prevented from forming parties, Socialists, Republicans, Christian Democrats, and Monarchists are represented in a loose grouping called the "moderate opposition." Most are professional people with little political experience. They are expected to present lists in Lisbon and Oporto and in three or four other of Portugal's 30 electoral districts.

There have been indications that lists may be filed by "independent" Monarchists and by a Communist-front group, the Junta Patriotica, but it seems unlikely that the government will consider them acceptable.

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4. Present party strengths: In the last election for deputies--in November 1957--the National Union won all 120 seats. In Braga, the only district where its candidates were still running on election day, the opposition won some 5,000 of the 60,000 votes cast. In the 1958 presidential election, the opposition polled about 25 percent of the vote and would have secured a considerably larger percentage in a free election.

5. Principal issues: The National Union may be expected to cite the regime's record of economic

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stability and call for national unity in the face of current difficulties in Africa and in the UN. The opposition, according to a program outlined last May, wants to "restore democratic liberties," including the abolition of press censorship and of the state security police. It asks amnesty for political prisoners, the right to form political parties, electoral reforms, and an end to the state corporative system.

6. Significance for the US: Since the government's continued control of the assembly is a foregone conclusion, the elections will have no effect on Portuguese policies affecting NATO or US base rights in the Azores. They may, however, give some limited indication--through opposition campaigning and possibly even a few opposition victories--of the regime's popular standing.

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